

from our viewpoint...

Saving water good; idling land bad plan

Bad idea.
A plan to take 100,000 acres in the Arkansas River valley out of crop production to retire water rights.
Bad, because it could cost businesses in 10 southwest Kansas counties \$8.7 million a year.
Bad because it relies on a federal program, Conservation Reserve, to pay farmers to idle the land. There's no guarantee the government will foot the bill or that Congress will continue the program.
Bad, because the world may well need the food — and fuel — being grown on that land.
Kansas does have a water shortage, especially out west. Most basins are over appropriated, that is, more well and ditch rights have been granted than there is water in most years.

Despite the fact that Kansas won a court order forcing Colorado to allow more flow at the state line, the Arkansas is dry west of Garden City most of the time. Farm wells suck up the flow.

The situation on the Ark isn't unusual — the other major basins of western Kansas, the Smoky Hill, Solomon, Saline and Republican — are over appropriated as well. Pumping has lowered the fabled Ogallala Aquifer to the point where wells are dropping in many areas. Some are close to running out of water.

But taking land out of production isn't necessarily the answer. Conservation Reserve, in fact, already has done that in many areas.

Better to shift farmers back to dryland production. With new seeds and optimum crops, they can produce efficiently on non irrigated fields, continuing to contribute to the economy.

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran has asked the secretary of agriculture to allow dryland farming on land taken out of production on the Ark. We agree with his plan, but still, the federal government is not a dependable partner in a long-range effort such as this.

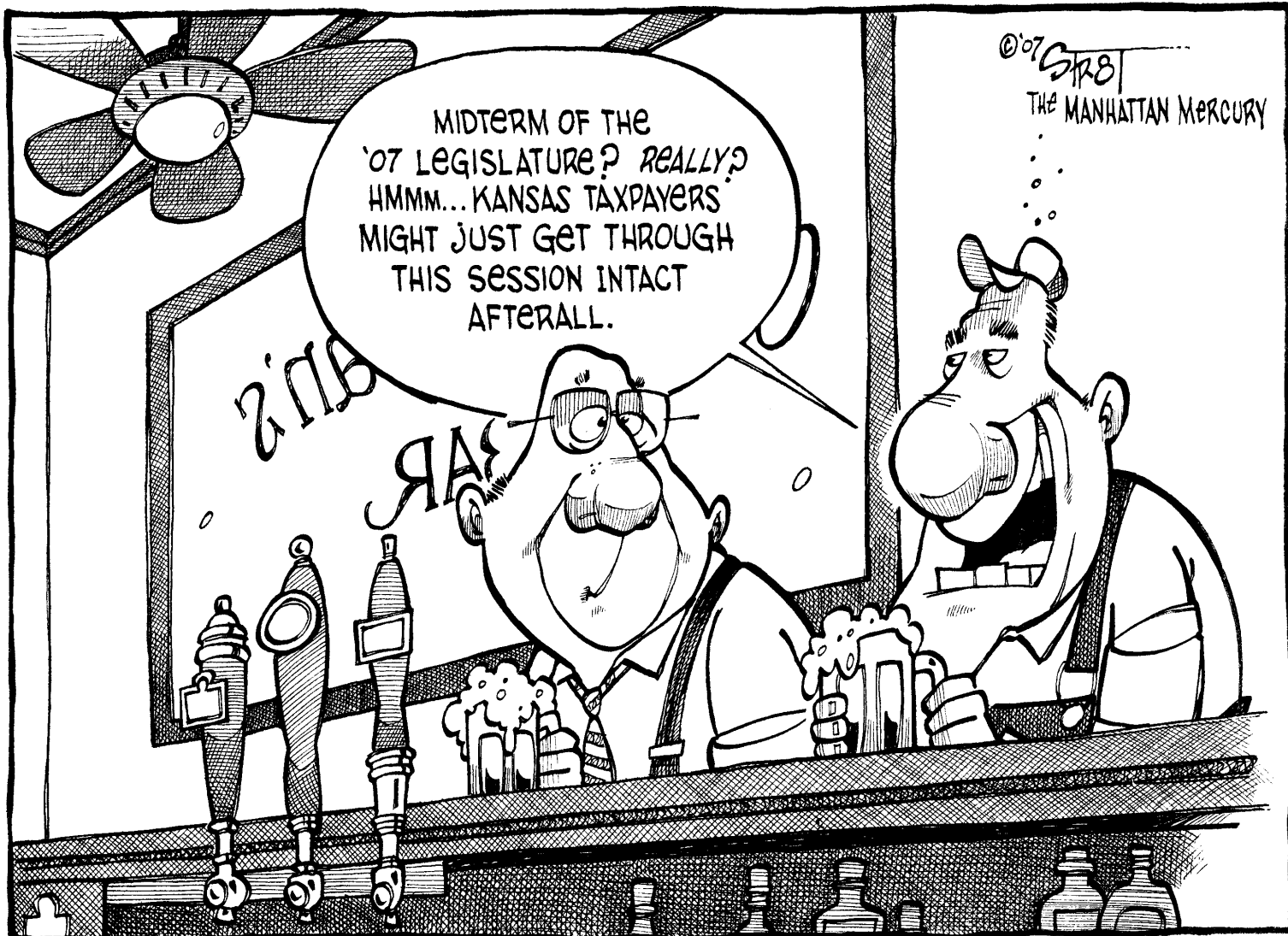
Whatever plan is adopted is liable to spread to other basins. Kansas has lost too many rural towns, businesses and schools as is. The state cannot and should not be pushing a plan to put even more of us out of business.

Yes, we need to save water.

No, we can't afford to irrigate as much as we have.

But the state shouldn't be paying to idle farmland. We need the production, we need the money, we need the grain.

This is a bad idea. — *Steve Haynes*



A thanks to our volunteer firemen

To the Editor:

We want to praise and thank our city volunteer firemen for their 'round-the-clock service, dedication and devotion in protecting and rescuing travelers, pets and all of our community buildings, assets and lives.

These men take time from their family activities, their sleep at night and their jobs to act on a call to care for us, and by doing so, they put their lives in danger.

These firemen train and meet regularly to learn to deal with the dangers they might be involved with so that we can be safe, and in doing so, they keep our fire insurance costs down, but when we don't have a skilled department, look out public. We take too much for granted and ignore these firemen and their services.

When the firemen see a problem with their



from our readers

● to the editor

fire chief, we should respect their comments and decision as to who they want leading them, or driving our big equipment. They know the person best and know they don't want to be led into a bad decision about fighting a fire or another emergency because the chief might not be physically or mentally fit to direct them.

We need to back our firemen right now and have our Goodland City Commissioners listen to their grievances. Our firemen should not have to quit their positions in order to get the commissioners and City Manager Wayne Hill

to recognize the bad position this fire chief has put all the working firemen in. The firemen live here, too.

We don't want to see more money spent to train all new men now, or to take our other city workers away from their jobs to learn fire fighting skills, or even to have our county firemen try to learn how to fight the city fires while trying to find men reliable to train to protect all of us. We already have very good men to call on to help us, so ask them to come back.

Talk to our city commissioners and Hill and express your thoughts and concerns. We need a fire chief we can be proud of, and one who will serve to the best of his ability in his position where we don't have to have constant issues.

Carol and W. Ken Baum
Goodland

The indefatigable Molly Ivins

You might not have liked her brand of left-liberal politics, but no one in America wrote a more entertaining, smart or partisan political column than Texas Troublemaker Molly Ivins, who died Jan. 31 of breast cancer at age 62.

No one had as much obvious fun writing and throwing her wit and opinions around, either.

Ivins made a national name for herself by doing biting color commentary on the wacky, rough-and-tumble politics of the Lone Star State. She also has been watching — and mocking — George W. Bush's career since he became governor of Texas.

In addition to her syndicated newspaper column, which was carried off and on in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, and her monthly pieces for Progressive magazine, she wrote best-sellers like "Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?" and "Shrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush." I talked to her in by telephone from her office in Austin, Texas, shortly before she came to give a public talk in Pittsburgh.

Q: Let's get the scandalous part out of the way right away — is it true you were the daughter of two well-heeled Texas Republicans?

A: Ummmm, yeah, my daddy was a corporate attorney — real right-wing. My mom was sort of a liberal Republican though. They always asked themselves where they went wrong, believe me.

Q: How did you become what you are?

A: I think this is true of a lot of southern liberals — it was the civil rights movement. If you grew up in the South before (then), I think kids are just sort of smart enough to figure out what kind of hypocrisy and unfairness was involved. I just kind of knew from the beginning that was a bunch of bull and got involved....

The next thing that came along was the anti-war movement, the war in Vietnam, and I was against that. And so people said, "Well, if you're in favor of the civil rights movement and against the war in Vietnam, that means you are a liberal. So I said, "OK," 'cause I didn't know anything. I was from East Texas.

Later on, people took to claiming it meant I was for high taxes and big government and all kinds of nonsense, and I figured out never to let anyone else define my political views.

Q: Before we get to your political views, you do realize that your column is carried in Pittsburgh by the Tribune-Review, which is published by the man (Richard Scaife) who....

A: I do, and I'm telling you that I'm proud of them.

Q: Do you find this ironic or frightening that you are our house progressive?

A: (big hearty laugh) I think it's j-u-s-t wonderful.

Q: Now we'll be serious again. How do you define your political position?

A: I think I'm a populist, and sort of a left-



bill steigerwald

● newsmakers

wing libertarian. In the '60s, we all had to have at least three hyphens in our political identities. People were always saying Marxist-Maoist-something or other. I think I'm a populist and left-wing libertarian.

Q: And that means?

A: Basically, what I'm trying to do is stick up for average people that I think are being screwed by the system.

Q: What's the most important issue that the country needs to address, fix, clear up?

A: I think we're really headed down the wrong path, in terms of starting to look like some Latin American country where rich people are just so rich it's unbelievable and they control the political system and everybody else is S-O-L.

Q: Who would you like to become president?

A: That's a good question. I think there are some good senators. You know, you always hesitate to predict who's going to be a good president. I actually voted for Ralph Nader, mostly because it was a safe vote.

Q: If part of your mission is to bring down the powerful, or to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, what would happen if one of your guys — Jim Hightower or Ralph Nader — had become president?

A: There, you run into the problem of those of us who are just sort of natural contrarians. We naturally feel that we should pick on everybody who has power.

Q: So if you were down in Cuba, you would be Castro's worst enemy?

A: Oh, sure. This is a guy who put journalists in jail. Come on, I don't like him.

I'm trying to think about that.... I think the only time I actually had a friend in political power was when Ann Richards was governor of Texas, and it sure as hell didn't prevent me from pissing on her when I thought she needed it (laughs). Find a euphemism for that.

Q: You've observed George W. Bush more closely than probably any journalist. What's the worst thing you know or can say about him?

A: Oh, God. I always said the worst Bush story I know was when on the day Karla Faye Tucker was killed — she was executed by the state of Texas; Bush had a long talk with someone he knew fairly well about the death penalty.

At the end of this long discussion, Bush summed up his feelings by saying, "Well, I know there is no evidence that shows the death penalty is a deterrent, but I just feel in my gut that it must be true."

What strikes me as scary about that story is

that I don't think this is a man who reasons very well. I never underestimated him to begin with, so naturally I wasn't struck with wonder when he did an adequate job after Sept. 11.

I do think that the people who ran around proclaiming that Winston Churchill had been reborn sounded a little silly. I mean, it's just George W. And he's always been sort of adequate.

Q: Has anything surprised you since Sept. 11 about the way George Bush has handled himself? Has he shown you any stuff you didn't think he had?

A: Nooooo. I must say I really am starting to question myself because I'm so complacent about my judgment of Bush. You know, I keep saying, "Yep, that's Bush."

"Yep, that's George W." "Yep, that's my boy." "Yep, I expected that one."

Maybe I'm just forgetting that I once felt differently, but when I re-read the Bush book that we wrote, "Shrub," it seems to me that it's all perfectly obvious. The problem with Bush is that he's just a CEO's dream. He is a corporate guy.

Q: He seems to be hiring good or competent help, whether you like them or not.

A: Yeah, that was the pattern we pointed out in the book. It's been part of his pattern. He tried different fields — the oil business, the baseball business — and when he first went into politics, he consistently found very good, older male mentors. So I was certainly not surprised when he did that again in Washington. At least he's smart enough to listen to them.

Q: What are you going to talk about in Pittsburgh?

A: Of course we have to talk about "The Situation," as the airline flight attendants say these days. I don't think we can discuss politics at all without discussing the aftermath of Sept. 11.

I must say, I had said months ago that we might want to think a little longer before we hit this tar baby — meaning Afghanistan. I still think Bush did the right thing. I don't think we had any choice. We had to go after them and we had to use the military. But we always knew it was going to be difficult and complicated and in fact he said so on numerous occasions.

What troubles me a little — and Bush's relationship with language is fairly tenuous; I think he's never understood that words need to be used precisely — is that just the other day he said there are no shades of gray in our war on terrorism.

Well, I don't know if you've been looking at the situation in Afghanistan, but if you have ever seen anything grayer than those warlords, I wish you'd let me know.

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